

Basic Gardening Terms

There are a few basic gardening terms that everyone interested in growing plants should understand. This language of gardening will help you understand what you read at the garden center, in gardening magazine, or watch on your favorite gardening show.

botanical name the scientific name for one specific plant; comprised of the Genus (always capitalized) and species (not capitalized); this combination is also referred to as the binomial nomenclature.

common name a name given to a plant that has no scientific standing; common names are often fun and colorful, but they can also be inaccurate; the same name may apply to more than one plant and they vary regionally.

annual a plant whose life cycle is completed in one season

biennial a plant whose life cycle is completed in two seasons

perennial a plant that lives more than two growing seasons; usually herbaceous and dormant during the winter

herbaceous non-woody plants that die back to the ground each winter and regrow the next season

woody plant with bark on older stems; woody stems usually survive over winter and increase in size each year

deciduous a plant that loses its leaves each winter

evergreen a plant that keeps its leaves throughout the whole year

groundcover a low-growing, spreading plant; usually 18 inches or less; often herbaceous

herb term usually applied to plants that are valued for culinary, aromatic or medicinal purposes; many herbs are also ornamental

hybrid a plant that results from crossing two closely related plants; hybrid plants do not come true from their own seed

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hardening off slowly exposing a plant to cooler temperatures to help it adapt to outdoor conditions; this process is also sometimes called **acclimating**

pollination in flowering plants, pollination is the transfer of pollen from the anther (male part) to the stigma (female part); pollination is necessary for the flower to form seed and often, fruit; some flowers are perfect (having all the necessary parts) and other flowers are imperfect (separate male and female flowers)

transplant to move a plant from one place to another

balled and burlapped/B&B preparing plants for transplanting by digging up the root ball and wrapping it in burlap to protect the root ball and aid handling

dormancy the extended period when a plant rests; most plants are dormant during the winter in our climate

soil layer of fine material on the crust of the earth composed tiny pieces of minerals, living and non-living organisms, water and air

loam soil that contains relatively equal parts of clay, sand and silt

humus organic (was once living) matter that has broken down in the soil

soil texture composition of the soil determined by the proportion of clay, silt and sand

drainage ability of the soil to release water

clay soil type made up of 50% or more clay (the smallest particles of minerals in the soil); clay soils : usually very heavy and drain slowly

silt the medium-size pieces of mineral that makes up soil; smaller particles than sand but larger than

sand the largest particles of minerals that make up soil

pH a measure of acidity or alkalinity of the soil on a scale ranging from 0 to 14; neutral soil has a pH 7.0

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native this term is poorly defined; it is usually used to refer to plants that were found growing in a given area before people began introducing non-native plants; although the word native is often used as positive and non-native as negative, there are invasive natives and very well-behaved non-natives **non-native or exotic** another poorly defined term; usually used to refer to any plants that were not originally growing in an area (i.e. when people arrived)

invasive any plant that is difficult to control

pinching/deadheading pinching is a process of removing the terminal (or tip) growth on a plant in order to encourage new growth; deadheading is removing the spent flowers to encourage new growth and blooms

horticulturist a person who specializes in plants and their culture

arborist a person who specializes in tree maintenance

landscape designer a person who specializes in the overall layout, design and construction of ornamental plantings and landscape features